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UNCLAS MANAMA 000399

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NEA/PI-CBOURGEOIS; NEA/PPD-MQUINN AND APENDLETON;
NEA/ARN, NEA/ARP CKANESHIRO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OEXC](#) [SCUL](#) [KMPI](#) [KPAO](#) [KDEM](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: MEPI'S "MY ARABIC LIBRARY" - BAHRAIN MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION REQUESTS MORE INFO

REFS: A) STATE 15320, B) BEIRUT 623,
C) WENGER/BOURGEOIS EMAILS, D) MANAMA 375

1. (U) This is an action request for NEA/PI; please
see para 6.

2. (U) PAO has met twice with senior Ministry of
Education officials in Bahrain about the MEPI Arabic
language early reading book program (on February 22 and
March 16). The Assistant Undersecretary for Curriculum
and Training told PAO and APAO on March 16 that the
Ministry had not yet made a decision about
participating in the program. The Ministry would
welcome a visit from a Scholastics Book Representative
who would provide further information about the books,
including a proposed list of titles and sample
translations.

3. (U) It is post's understanding that Ms. Michelle
Alwan, Middle East Area Sales Manager of Scholastics
Books, will visit the region in April/May. Post
recommends that she visit Bahrain with further
information about the project, including the proposed
list of books and samples of books that have already
been translated.

4. (SBU) It seems that "My Arabic Library" has been
the talk of the Ministry. The Assistant Undersecretary
told the PAO that a number of Ministry staff have
expressed serious concerns about the project during
internal meetings, and some have come out completely
against the project. The Assistant Undersecretary
supports the project, stating, "These people are living
in the past - aren't these just children's bedtime
stories?" He cautioned, however, that the Minister
will decide only after he has met with Alwan and seen a
list of the books. During a separate meeting about the
GLOBE Program on March 21, the Director of Intermediate
and Secondary Education in Bahrain, the official
responsible for all public high schools and middle
schools in the country, surprised the APAO and PAS FSN
by bringing up "My Arabic Library" and stating that he
was not supportive of the idea. He said, "We have been
discussing this new Arabic Books Program from America.
We have our own books that reflect our culture and
traditions, there is little need for us to import."
(Comment: This individual has been extremely
supportive of the GLOBE Program, and is not anti-
American.) Further, during a round table discussion at
Al Wasat Arabic newspaper two weeks ago, Charge and
Emboffs were surprised when a representative from an
Islamist political society who works at the Ministry of
Education, used "My Arabic Library" as an example of an
educational reform program being imposed by the USG on
the Gulf, as reported in reftel D.

5. (SBU) PAO informed the Assistant Undersecretary
that per ref A, para 7, "acknowledgement of MEPI
sponsorship of the Program would likely be printed on
the inside of the books." Given the sensitivities
surrounding the program, he recommended not overtly
identifying the books as receiving U.S. funding. He
stated, "Good work speaks for itself and teachers,
parents, and students could react negatively to this
program if it seemed to have political connotations.
Stamping the book cover would be counterproductive to
the purpose of the program. Arabs want to preserve
their cultures and politicizing a reading program
equals indoctrination in the viewpoint of many.
Politicizing a reading program takes away its
substance." (Comment: This official has been
extremely supportive of all MEPI initiatives, and he
personally supports My Arabic Library. End Comment.)

6. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Please advise Alwan's
travel dates to Bahrain so post can request a meeting
with the Minister of Education for Alwan to present the
requested information. Charge Ford and PAO will
accompany Alwan on the meeting. Post further requests
that Alwan be prepared to inform the Minister exactly

how U.S. support/funding for the books will be identified.

FORD